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ABSTRACT

Two major events affecting American education as a whole are the recent Supreme Court decision on tuition tax credits and the appearance of reports that have placed education at the top of the national agenda. A third major development is the appreciation of the teacher as essential to education, an orientation that has arisen from the awareness that prospective teachers may be less competent than their predecessors. Recent reports indicating ways America's schools can be improved bring educators very powerful and needed allies who can make a real difference. We members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) must show a willingness to move cooperatively in the direction of these reports. In a time of sweeping changes, organizations and individuals willing to participate, to compromise, and to talk will not be swept away. We should support entry level tests for future teachers, higher teacher salaries, and strong student discipline. While we should oppose traditional merit pay, we should be open to certain master teacher plans and measures eliminating traditional types of authority and teacher supervision in schools. The AFT continues to support efforts to reinvigorate compensatory education. This organization should show America that we support reform efforts on the national agenda; the stakes are not just education or the union, but the future of the nation. (RH)

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ALBERT SHANKER'S ADDRESS TO THE 1983 AFT CONVENTION

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Albert Shanker's Address to the

1983 AFT Convention

The Year in Retrospect

This is the time each year in our convention when we take a look at where we are coming from and where we are going. This has been another year filled with events of great importance.

First, I would like to spend a few minutes on events that are crucial to us in the American Federation of Teachers. It was not too many years ago when we were an organization of only 50,000 nationally. Now we are approaching 600,000 because we successfully delivered our message to teachers, health care workers, those in higher education, public employees and professionals across the country.

Given the nature of the times and the number of

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disappointments that we have suffered—layoffs and retrenchment—we have had an amazingly good year. With collective bargaining victories in Broward County, Florida and Peoria, Illinois, we have clearly become the majority organization in these states. ***(Applause)***

These elections and others were won partly because of the AFT's solid position on educational standards.

We have at this convention the largest delegation of health care employees that we have ever had and we welcome you. ***(Applause)***

We have suffered a very great disappointment in higher education with a very narrow loss by a handful of votes in the state colleges of California. We expect to make a comeback here and we are still organizing higher education throughout the country. That won't stop.

We have had major victories in the political arena as well. I congratulate all of you, and the members you represent, for both the financial contributions and the activities in the political campaigns of last year. It is clear from the way the Congress and even the administration are acting that they did get our message. In gubernatorial, senatorial and House election campaigns throughout the country, our activities and efforts made a distinct difference.

On the legal front we have suffered a great disappointment, but that issue is not yet over. The Supreme Court declined to hear the Boston teachers' case. A similar case is now on its way to the Supreme Court and we intend to pursue that issue, either as leading advocates or as amicus, until the Supreme Court rules that contracts and seniority are not to be overruled on the basis of racial quotas. ***(Applause)***

These, in a sense, are organizational events although they have implications far beyond the organization. This was a year which saw something else, a number of major happenings in the world of education.

Tuition Tax Credits A Real Threat

First is the recent Supreme Court decision on tuition tax credits. I have heard a number of attempts at optimistic interpretation: that it was a narrow decision which

applies only to Minnesota, or that it was not a tax credit, but rather a tax deduction. I wish I could stand before you and give an optimistic interpretation of that Supreme Court decision. I can't.

That decision states clearly, and I believe wrongly, that certain types of deductions or credits, essentially tax assistance to non-public schools, even if these are operated by religious institutions, are not unconstitutional.

The danger is that it is possible for the federal government, other states and local school districts to adopt laws similar to the Minnesota law. The amounts of money may vary, but there is no question that the issue has now gone beyond the realm of constitutionality.

We believe that tax credits are unconstitutional, and we did not believe that the Supreme Court would act in the way it has. And in previous addresses before you, I indicated that I was very worried that many of our members were not heavily and deeply and properly engaged in political activity on this issue because they felt that eventually the Supreme Court was going to declare it unconstitutional anyway—so why take it that seriously.

Well, now we don't have that luxury anymore. We can't just sit back and say, "It doesn't make much difference because the Court will decide with us."

This issue will now be decided by the Congress of the United States, each state legislature and each school board. In the future it may again be decided by the Supreme Court, and we will have a great stake in seeing to it that the Supreme Court of the future has a composition that is more favorable to us in terms of issues like this than the justices who are there now.

That is an event which we have to keep before us now in terms of every decision that we make. We must ask ourselves with respect to each and every decision and action that we take, "Is what we are doing going to help bring tuition tax credits about?"

Each and every thing we do will either help to push the tax credits and undermine support of public education, or it will build support for our nation's public schools. It is going to be hard to get used to doing that, but it is something that we must do.

Education at Top of Agenda

The second major event for the year is the appearance of reports that have placed education at the top of the national agenda. For a long period of time we thought this condition could never exist again. After all, the birth rate went down. And the percent of the voting public who are parents dropped from 50 or 60 to somewhere around 20 percent. The issues of public concern focused on senior citizens, or Social Security, and education somehow moved to the background.

But today education is one of the top two issues, second only to the economic and unemployment question on the national agenda. All national polls show that your next president of the United States and next Congress may well be elected on the basis of educational issues.

And we have a series of reports: the National Commission on Excellence, Twentieth Century Fund, the Education Commission of the States and some others about to come out on high schools. By the time the year is over we may very well have 15 or 20 national reports all saying much the same thing. They point in the same direction. They move the emphasis to excellence and to quality. They talk about things that we have been talking about for a long, long time. And they discuss a few things that we haven't been talking about, at least we haven't favored.

They talk about tests—testing teachers, testing students. They talk about a tough curriculum instead of soft courses and electives which don't have very substantial content. They talk about doing something about discipline problems in school. They talk about major investments of money. They talk about policies involving promotion of students and the graduation of students from schools. They talk about changing the nature of rewards for teachers. They all talk about finding some method to deal with the problem of dismissing incompetent teachers.

Many people think this is just one of those fads. Every once in a while the country gets interested in something and you hear people saying: "Well, the country cannot focus its attention for more than a week or a month, or

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two months or five months. This will all go away."

I don't believe that it will. There are, of course, political, social or economic and religious fads. They do come and they do go. But a fad is generally based on something which is not rooted in a real problem. But what we face in education is certainly very real. Our problem is similar to the fact that several years ago we all of a sudden discovered that we had not been rebuilding our auto plants, our steel plants and our prior industrial capacity. Reindustrialization was a problem. We had to reinvest, reindustrialize, because otherwise we weren't going to compete with the rest of the world and our own standard of living would decline.

Infrastructure Falling Apart

Then, after reindustrialization we discovered something else. Not only did our private industry have to be rebuilt, but our public infrastructure was falling apart—roads, bridges, water and sewer systems; in fact, our railroad system, harbors, docks and so forth.

Again, these are things that don't go away. If you don't rebuild plants, just thinking about it doesn't make the problem go away. It gets worse and worse. If you don't rebuild the bridges, that problem doesn't go away.

Now we have found that neglect in education and neglect of human resources is having and will have exactly the same disastrous effect neglect did in the area of private industry and the area of public infrastructure.

So this is not something that will go away. If we don't do something about educational improvement, we won't have mathematicians, scientists, engineers and computer specialists. Indeed, we won't have enough people who can read and write and think and do the work that the nation needs to do. So, it is not going to go away.

I like the phrase "a nation at risk" because by using those words the National Commission on Excellence in Education effectively put education on a par with national defense.

(Applause)

A nation at risk means that a country can go down. It can fall apart. We can lose. It can disappear. Those are strong words, and they are good words.

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There is a third aspect, a major development this year, and that is a focus on the teacher as essential to education. That wasn't always so.

There was a particular period in the 1950s and 1960s, after Sputnik, when people became very much interested in education. They weren't interested in teachers. Those were the days when various companies were trying to put out what they called teacher-proof materials. That is the equivalent of foolproof. ***(Laughter)***

They had given up during that period of time on teachers. They had instruction books, TV sets and all sorts of things; anything that a teacher can't manipulate, change or break would work. They would work, but the teachers somehow gummed them up.

New Education Climate

Well, not so. And now we find a new and different climate. Now we have governors and businessmen saying that without good teachers we are not going to have a good educational system. That has not been said by us but by those people.

However, these governors and businessmen now realize that teaching in our schools at the present time is a group that is substantially more talented than the group which is about to come in and replace us.

They realize that we had certain unique opportunities in the past to recruit outstanding teachers. Such as during the Depression of the 1930s when it was a decent job in a period when there weren't any others.

Then there were those who came in during and in the aftermath of World War II, with the belief that there was about to be another depression.

I know my mother told me if I wanted to get into a field where I will always have a job—***(Laughter)***
(Applause)

Then, of course, we had the draft between World War II and the Vietnam war when exemptions were granted to those who preferred to fight in our schools.
(Applause)

We also had a very large number of minority teachers for whom other jobs in the private sector were closed. The public sector, even with some continuing discrimina-

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tion, was a much more open field. With the success of the civil rights movement, many more talented minority group members began seeking jobs in the open market rather than feeling that they had to come into teaching because that was the place where they would have a better chance.

And, of course, the largest single group of talented people who made sure that education worked over the years was women. ***(Applause)***

Well, the women's movement has worked to such an extent that we now have an educational disaster. Women no longer feel that teaching and nursing are the two top fields. Women are now going in a big way into medicine, dentistry, architecture, engineering, business administration—***(Applause)***

—and into every field where there is money and prestige on the job.

Prospective Teachers Less Competent

These conditions have brought us a new kind of prospective teacher. We know who they are, because the colleges have test scores, and it is disastrous. The people who are willing to come into teaching—by the way, they don't stay very long, either—are the bottom of all people who are entering and graduating from college.

I am speaking, of course, as a group. There are always a few exceptions, but on a national scale, that is an accurate picture.

A recent report in the current issue of the *Teachers College Record* puts it succinctly. Of those who take a teaching job, 15 percent drop out the first year, and by and large they are the ones who had the best grades. Eight percent drop out the next year, 6 percent the next, and before the end of five or six years half of the most talented drop out.

Another interesting piece of information is that a sample reflecting 36 percent of the nation's prospective teachers flunked tests in reading, writing and mathematics proficiency.

That is pretty shocking, but what was more shocking

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was that a few months later they went back to find out which of these teachers were hired. They found that while 36 percent of all the prospective teachers sampled were incompetent, 55 percent of all those actually hired by superintendents or principals were among those who had flunked the exam.

In other words, principals or superintendents tend to feel more comfortable with teachers who are less competent. ***(Applause)***

That should raise some questions about the merit pay issue. ***(Applause)***

Well, those are the issues before us, and they are also the issues before the nation. It is a period of great danger, and it is a period of unprecedented opportunity.

Reports Bring New Allies

Now, the reports which have been published bring us very powerful and needed allies who can make a real difference. With fewer and fewer parents out there, we have to help the general community understand that education is not just good for children and parents, but good for our entire society.

Our allies are businessmen, governors and others who realize that there is a powerful and yet simple idea which is sweeping the country. This idea will take two realizations to turn education around and make it work.

Time for Open-mindedness

First, if you need a program which focuses on quality, you can't just keep doing the same things that have proven unsuccessful.

We must keep in mind that for many years we have been negotiating for teachers. We have been winning benefits. We have been advancing collective bargaining, and now we have a nation that believes the reports (I believe them) that the nation is at risk. As we move in the months ahead, we must be sure that the public doesn't see teachers' unions and collective bargaining as an obstacle to the improvement of education.

There is at least one teacher organization that has put itself in that position despite the fact that the general public now seems willing to pay higher taxes for the

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much needed changes in education.

Second, these reports reject tuition tax credits or vouchers either implicitly or explicitly. They recognize that we can't have both tuition tax credits and necessary, massive overhaul of our public education system.

We must show a willingness to move far in the direction of these reports, cooperatively and eagerly, because we stand a great chance that these powerful report sponsors will say yes, the nation is at risk, we were willing to spend a lot of money and we wanted to make a lot of changes, but you know, it is hopeless because we came up against inflexible unions, school boards and administrators. If these leaders of government and industry after having invested time, effort and prestige on a program to rebuild American education find their efforts frustrated, there is no question as to where the tilt of public policy will go. We will lose the support that we now have. There will be a massive move to try something else, and it will all be over.

The American Federation of Teachers is in a very fortunate position. We don't have to sit here and rethink our position on whether our students will be tested. We don't have to rethink whether a teacher coming in who is going to be a math teacher should be able to pass a math test or a language teacher a language test. We don't have to rethink whether we want a tough program geared toward doing something about disciplinary problems.

AFT Out Front

On almost every program put on the agenda, the American Federation of Teachers was there 20 or 30 years ago working on the problem. I am sorry to say that the other organization hasn't gotten there yet. In normal times, I wouldn't regret that too much because we are winning collective bargaining campaigns by appealing to teachers on these very issues. Let us keep those positions.

We will go out and talk to American teachers and each year we will bring in tens of thousands of more teachers because the other organization doesn't represent the American public on education or the views of teachers

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either. They have lost credibility with the general public because they are against everything that stands for quality. They are unable to carry a fight on this issue. That is too bad, because it is not just a question of their taking an incorrect position on these issues. They are a larger organization and if we are to maintain public respect and support for public education, it will be important that we be together on these questions.

And so I am here to say that even on issues that we feel uncomfortable with, that we disagree with rather strongly, we have to ask ourselves what are the consequences if we win the fight. What is the price? Is it worthwhile?

In a period of great turmoil and sweeping changes, those individuals and organizations that are mired in what seems to the public to be petty interests are going to be swept away in the larger movements. Those organizations and individuals who are willing and able to participate, to compromise and to talk will not be swept away. On the contrary they will shape the directions of all the reforms and changes that are about to be made. That is what we in the AFT intend to do. We intend to be on board shaping the direction of every change in education. ***(Applause)***

Need Entry Level Tests

Now let me turn to the teacher shortage crisis or teacher replacement crisis. What should be done about it? I think the answers are pretty clear, and I think that the changes will be exciting. We need to test teachers.

I must tell you that I felt rather ashamed at something that happened a few weeks ago. The state of Florida has instituted tests for teachers and some organizations are opposing them. The terrible thing that happened a few weeks ago is that the same test that was given to teachers was given to a normal sixth grade class. The students in the sixth grade class did as well or better than the average of all the teachers who are coming in to teach in the state.

I do not believe that the test of teacher competence is a sixth grade test. ***(Applause)***

For a teacher who tries to reach the student when a

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student doesn't understand, it is not enough to do a problem in one particular way or to be able to explain something in a particular way. When a student doesn't understand, you may have to approach it in a second way, third way, fourth way or fifth way and you can't do that as a teacher unless you know a lot more than the student whom you are about to teach. ***(Applause)***

We ought to support the idea that future teachers should be tested. I would say an absolute bare minimum score on the test ought not to be at the level of what their students are going to be learning, but the teachers ought to be in the top half of all college students in the country, so we are not getting the bottom half. ***(Applause)***

Need Higher Salaries

That is not going to be an easy thing to get. You know why. Every teacher and every superintendent knows why: if you pick from the top half of college graduates, you will not be able to pay 10, 11 or 12 thousand dollars. ***(Applause)***

You will have to go up to 17, 18 and 19 thousand dollars right now. ***(Applause)***

There is a second thing we ought to do. A lot of talented people will become teachers because they are interested in mathematics, foreign languages, English or social studies. They are not interested in 36 credits of boring education courses. ***(Loud applause and whistles.)***

We are not against professional education. We are not against professional training. But at the very least professional training should do no harm. ***(Laughter and applause)***

And if it drives talented people away, it is doing harm. That hasn't changed.

We need salary schedules that are not 15 steps long or 20 steps long or with longevity 25 or 30 steps long. There are no such situations anywhere else. Everywhere else you reach maxium in three years, four years or five years. These pay scales were developed when teaching was women's work. They were designed to discriminate. Women would come in at first, second, third step or

fourth and leave at the early steps, so only a few survivors who stayed for a long period of time would get a salary that approximated a living wage.

Well, life isn't like that anymore. Nobody is going to start at a horribly subminimum salary and wait for 10, 15 and 20 years to get maximum pay.

Need Stronger Student Discipline

The fourth point is we are not going to get people interested in English or mathematics or social studies and language unless we solve discipline problems and take out of our schools those students who prevent teachers from teaching. ***(Prolonged applause and cheers)***

Teachers are not interested in disciplining children. They did not decide to become policemen, or psychiatrists or jailers. They want to be teachers.

Next, I believe that the movement to strengthen the curriculum is something that will be a great help in attracting talented people into teaching. A person interested in English wants to teach that and not remedial reading. Those interested in calculus and geometry and algebra don't want to correct third and fourth grade arithmetic errors if they teach in high schools. As teachers, if we can come in and teach children a subject that we love, it will attract better teachers. ***(Applause)***

Now I come to something to which I will return in a few minutes: the whole relationship between teachers and supervisors. Maybe once upon a time school was an educational factory in which teachers were graduates of one- or two-year normal school or training school programs. They were viewed as being just a little ahead of their students. The principal and superintendent were considered the only professionals and college graduates in the school and were made the foreman and boss, while the teachers were the educational workers on the assembly line. That isn't true today. Our teachers are frequently more educated in their own field than the supervisors who supervise them. ***(Applause)***

We are not going to get people who really know Shakespeare and Dickens and mathematics, who have self-respect and high regard for their work, when someone who knows less than they do comes in and tells

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them what to do. We have to rethink the authoritarian nature of the schools. ***(Applause)***

Then finally, there needs to be some public recognition of the importance of the job that teachers do. That includes the President of the United States who I hope will start saying good things about teachers instead of some of the bad things. ***(Scattered boos)***

Don't do that tomorrow unless we want to re-elect him. ***(Applause)***

If we do that tomorrow, it will go out through the whole country! "Look how the President was treated! These people are not fit to teach our kids." Not a winner. Not a winner.

Against Traditional Merit Pay

What about the tough issues? We believe we have the same interest as the general public does in seeing to it that teachers who are incompetent do not remain as teachers. They don't do anybody any good and they don't do us any good. We believe we will develop a new system which will enable us to be rid of incompetents without sacrificing basic due process, but it will result in changes.

I want to get to the question of merit pay and the master teachers. I wish we could find some different language because these words cover a fairly wide variety of different programs. I want to say that we were traditionally and still are against schemes of a certain type and we have reasons for being against those proposals.

The first hallmark of the traditional scheme was that it was not an instrument for providing decent and adequate salaries for everyone. In essence it was a way to tell the public that most of the people who were teaching were no good and only a few were worth it.

A second hallmark of traditional merit pay plans was that an immediate supervisor, either a principal or superintendent or somebody like that, would decide who got the money. We all know that principals have their own jobs to do and everybody believes his or her own job is the most important in the world. The principal does not teach children, a principal has to get reports in, and any teacher who gets reports in on time is obviously

an outstanding teacher in the eyes of the principal.

Superintendents have to have their contracts renewed. There is nothing more important than that. We understand that the whole future of any given school system depends on whether a superintendent gets his contract renewed; and any teacher who helps by not criticizing or rocking the boat is certainly a fine teacher.

It is very clear that putting the decision process in the hands of supervisors who have different interests could result in either favoritism or irrelevant criteria of selection.

I guess the third major item is that many of these proposals, while rewarding even a few extremely meritorious teachers, are usually put together in such a way that they demean everyone else. ***(Applause)***

Years ago we started on a program called a "More Effective Schools Plan." No one remembers why it was called the "More Effective Schools Plan." But if we called these few schools the effective schools, that would make all the others ineffective. By calling them "more effective" schools, it made all the others effective.

No school system gains if it recognizes and rewards a certain number of very outstanding people, if it shatters and destroys the will and spirit and morale of all those others who stay on the team. ***(Applause)***

Open to Certain Master Teacher Plans

Well, we have to recognize that on the national scene there are some new proposals. I did not react to Lamar Alexander's proposal the same way I reacted to the kinds of schemes I just talked about because his proposal isn't like any of those three. It doesn't do any of those terrible things that I just talked about. It may create other problems. It doesn't mean it is a good idea, but it is not a merit pay or master teacher scheme in the same sense as those that we have been criticizing.

I am not going to talk about his plan. He will be here Wednesday. He is an eloquent spokesman for that plan. I urge you to give not only the governor but the plan a good deal of consideration.

Remember, if the country is moving in a certain direc-

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tion, in some situations it may not be whether we have a plan or no plan, it may be whether we have a better plan or a worse plan. We ought to look at the Alexander plan in that light.

I do wish to say that none of these master teacher proposals will accomplish the top priority or solve the top problem that we have in education. We talked about it a minute ago. We are not getting the same talent or quality in teaching as a result of the past history affecting education.

Does anybody really think that a bright, young man or woman graduating from college is going to go to Tennessee and start working at a beginning salary of roughly $10,000 a year? Is this person going to be a talented, wonderful person who will accept the low pay because he feels 8 or 15 years later he will be recognized as a master teacher and get a big salary increase? That is known in psychological terms as delaying gratification. We don't make them that way anymore. ***(Applause)***

Plan Could Lessen Principal's Control

A few minutes ago I said that we will not attract good teachers if we have the same boss/teacher relationship as we have today. If you will listen carefully to Governor Alexander's proposal, you will find that he addressed the problem effectively. It could very well turn out that under the plan half of the people in the state of Tennessee become senior teachers or master teachers. They would remain in the classroom, working longer hours or longer months in order to train teachers, develop curriculum and other things. If half the teachers in the state were doing that, what would the principal do?

It may be that this proposal will eliminate traditional types of authority and supervision, moving us closer to a college model where the college president doesn't walk into the classroom and ask you for a lesson plan, but treats you as a respected professor.

I am sticking my neck out on this. I hope by the time this week is over that we are all willing to stick our necks out. Twenty years ago when collective bargaining

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first came in, we were the organization that brought it about and we brought it about by sticking our necks out.

We had only 50,000 members in the entire United States and we were asking that teachers in every district have an election where the majority organization would prevail. Wasn't that an idiotic thing for a small minority to do...demand elections?

We did demand elections. We went through a wrenching experience at conventions that if collective bargaining came about because of our efforts against rival organizations, we might be cutting our own throats. Teachers recognized our leadership. We grew as a result of it. This is the time when we need to demonstrate a similar type of courage on the question of educational issues.

One of the key things that is happening—because of a position that another organization has taken—is unfortunate. Merit pay, instead of being one of 15 issues on the national scene today, one of 15 or 20 items mentioned in every one of these reports, has become a life or death issue. The entire national consciousness has been diverted from all the other important issues and recommendations. Everyone is concentrating on this one item.

The American Federation of Teachers will not allow merit pay or the master teacher to become the one single dominant, exclusive issue in this national discussion. ***(Cheers and applause)***

We have got another problem out there with the general public and it is that everyone has gone to school! That is a problem because we are addressing a subject that everyone has had some experience with. You had 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 really great teachers, and you would really like to do something wonderful for them. And then you had some who either bored you or weren't so good. I did. I had a lot of great teachers. Somehow you would like to get even. ***(Laughter)***

That is the general public out there.

Major Philosophical Differences Between AFT and NEA

The unfortunate thing is that the NEA has made Ronald Reagan look like a good education president by allowing the whole debate to center on this one issue.

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Actually this issue should be moved to the background, and the focus should be on Reagan.

More is at stake in the conflict that exists between our two organizations than just the organizational conflict. We are not just talking about organizational management. Basically, it is not just a question of for or against merit pay, or for or against master teacher, or for or against tests.

There is a vast philosophical difference between our two organizations. They say tests are inaccurate, tests don't tell you anything, tests are racist because minority groups don't do as well. They say you can't tell a good teacher from a bad teacher because it is all a matter of opinion.

Our philosophy, of course, is something quite different. Tests may be somewhat inaccurate, but it is better to have an inaccurate measuring tool than none at all. If minority groups don't do as well in tests, it is because of our history and society. It tells us we have a lot to make up for and tests are very useful in that respect.

(Applause)

If you can't tell that there are good teachers and bad teachers and everything is a matter of opinion, what gives you or me the right to hold a teacher's certificate? If it is strictly a matter of opinion, then even the man on the street is fit to judge merit.

If we convince the general public we don't know anything, there are a lot of people who don't know anything. They could take our places. The worst possible platform for a teacher to run on is that no one knows anything. That is not a good way to sell ourselves.

There is a reason for this fear of tests. The fear is that if the public finds out that some students are flunking or test scores are dropping, teachers might be blamed. But just as with health care, there are more factors than just the doctor's role that affect my health or your health. The same with education: there are more factors than just the teacher's role that affect educational health and success.

Just yesterday in the *Los Angeles Times* when parents were interviewed and asked what they thought to be the single, most important factor for the decline in the schools, they answered, "Parents, 42 percent." All the other items followed that.

Reinvigorate Compensatory Education

Before concluding, I would like to say one other thing. The new agenda is quality and excellence, and we welcome this. We ought to keep on the national agenda something else, and that is still some unfinished business.

We should stand before the American public when we are talking about standards and continue to advocate a program of quality and excellence. But we should not abandon the poor and needy and the handicapped. We ought to reinvigorate the programs that we have succeeded in all these years. ***(Prolonged applause)***

Action Agenda

Where do we go from here? First, there should be an expression at some point in this convention, a willingness to cooperate and work along with educational reform.

Second, early this fall we will have four regional conferences dealing with the entire educational reform agenda where we will involve local and state leadership throughout the country in crucial policies for the American Federation of Teachers.

Third, we have got to see to it that we throw ourselves into the elections for the Senate and the House and the presidency of the United States to make sure that we get back both the Senate and the White House next year. ***(Applause)***

We should strengthen our relationship with local business communities over the next year. And finally, we should show at every level, state and local and national, that we are working to bring about the educational reforms which are on the national agenda.

Now, I would like to conclude with just two more points. One of them also deals with a very important set of issues which are the difference between the two rival organizations. The heart of the question is whether the American public will support public education or will move over toward private and parochial schools. At the crux of this issue are the positions which have been

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taken by the National Education Association on two major issues. One of them has to do with the Ku Klux Klan and the other has to do with curriculum guide on nuclear disarmament.

Now, in their book on the Ku Klux Klan, the NEA states that the Ku Klux Klan is the tip of the iceberg and that America is essentially a racist society in which the Ku Klux Klan is the visible part of the iceberg. The lesson plan says that racism permeates our entire society.

I think that teachers because of our own intellectual qualities should be careful how we use our language. If we are a racist society today, what were we from the period of slavery up until the recent Supreme Court decisions? And if we are today a racist society, what phrase will we use to describe South Africa?

If we are a racist society, why do we put Martin Luther King on our postage stamp and honor him with a national holiday and not the Ku Klux Klan?

Isn't it also true that there are many of the opposite opinion, that we were racists and are now essentially, if you will look at all the countries of the world, the country that is doing more than any other nation to overcome the past? Perhaps we are not doing enough, but it is more than any other nation.

That is a point of view supported by some evidence. Which one of these points of view is right, or is there a third or fourth? I have my opinion, you have yours.

The question is if we go to the taxpayers and say, "Support public schools because we are not Catholic, we are not fundamentalists, we are not Ku Klux Klan, the public schools are a place where our children are not going to be indoctrinated into a particular point of view. How can we return to the public saying that, and then have the teacher organizations send a lesson plan out to each teacher in the country telling them to teach a particular point of view, not both points of view?

Teach Children How to Think

We in the American Federation of Teachers must take the position that our job is not to teach children what to think, but to teach them how to think. ***(Applause)***

The future of public education in this country may

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very well depend on whether the philosophy of the AFT or the philosophy of the NEA prevails.

I strongly believe that if we didn't exist, and if the NEA represented all the teachers in America (with all their positions on propaganda and on standards) that the chances for survival of American public education would be indeed very small.

The reaction of the public against positions of that sort would lead them to believe that there is no other alternative but to try something else.

The Stakes Are the Future of the Country

Now, what about today, the Fourth of July? It reminds us of what is really at stake. You must remember a little about the history of this country, the wilderness that it was, the people who came here who were not royalty and aristocrats, but in many ways the undesirable and the unwanted.

The chances for the success and even survival of this country were very small. If there had been a man from Mars visiting at that time, he would have said a nation made up of those lowly characters of different languages and different religions will end up not as one nation, will end up killing each other. will end up fighting each other, will end up destroying each other. They will end up like all the separate countries in all the other parts of the world. But it didn't happen.

Instead, we became the richest nation, the most powerful nation, the most free nation, in the world. The nation to which millions of refugees around the world risked their lives for a chance to come.

The public schools of this country by bringing together people of different languages and religions played a major part in building and in holding this country together. Anything which threatens to destroy our public schools threatens to destroy the future of our country. We can still fall apart in separate groups. ***(Applause)***

The stakes are not just education, the stakes are certainly not just union. The stakes are the future of the country, and I know this union will rise to the challenge. ***(Applause)***

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